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MAR 11 1952

~~SECRET~~ SECURITY INFORMATION

C E N T R A L I N T E L L I G E N C E A G E N C Y

BOARD OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

10 March 1952

MEMORANDUM FOR: Mr. Allan Evans, OIR
Colonel Gerald F. Lillard, G-2
Captain Ray Malpass, ONI
Colonel Edward H. Porter, AFOIN
Colonel S. M. Lansing, JIG

SUBJECT : SE-23: Prospects for a Middle East Defense Organization

1. The attached draft estimate, urgently requested by the NSC Senior Staff, is forwarded for review.

2. It is requested that your representative meet with us at 9:30 Wednesday, 12 March, in Room 146 South Building to discuss this estimate, with a view to submitting it to the IAC for consideration at 10:30 Thursday, 13 March.

3. The meeting of the IAC representatives on NIE-49 scheduled for 10:00 Wednesday, 12 March, is hereby cancelled until further notice.

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Executive Secretary

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SECURITY INFORMATION

C E N T R A L I N T E L L I G E N C E A G E N C Y

10 March 1952

SUBJECT: SE-23: PROSPECTS FOR A MIDDLE EAST DEFENSE ORGANIZATION

ESTIMATE

I. PRESENT STATUS OF THE MIDDLE EAST COMMAND PROPOSAL

1. The establishment of a Middle East Defense organization was first proposed in October 1951, when the US, the UK, France, and Turkey invited Egypt to join with them in setting up a Middle East Command (MEC). Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa had already agreed in principle to participate in MEC. In November 1951, the sponsoring powers informed Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and Israel of the principles which they would follow in the establishment of MEC. By implication these states were invited to join in the enterprise as associate members.

2. The major objective of MEC was to strengthen the defenses of the Middle East through the cooperative effort of all states interested in its defense, whether or not territorially part of the

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area. Organizationally, MEC would consist of two bodies: (a) the command structure itself, including the Supreme Allied Commander Middle East and his staff; and (b) a Middle East defense liaison organization, in which all sponsoring and associate members would be represented and which would serve as a link between the command and all the member states. It was envisioned that the MEC organization would: (a) develop plans for operations in the area in time of war or international emergency; (b) provide advice, training and materiel to the Middle Eastern countries on request; and (c) arrange for use of facilities by MEC through specific agreements between MEC and the individual states providing such facilities. It was stated that a continuing aim of MEC would be to increase the defense capabilities of the Middle Eastern countries in order to permit a proportionate reduction in the peacetime role of states not territorially part of the area. It was also stated that MEC would not interfere in problems and disputes arising within the area.

3. The sponsoring powers hoped that the MEC proposal would contribute to a compromise solution of the Anglo-Egyptian controversy. The Wafd government in Egypt, however, summarily rejected the four-power proposal as an attempt to substitute four-power occupation of Egyptian territory for British occupation. Practically all politically articulate elements in Egypt have approved of the government's position. King Farouk and the present Hilali government are

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more favorably disposed toward MEC, but even they demand prior acceptance of at least the principle of early and complete evacuation of British troops from Egyptian soil and recognition same as of Farouk's title as King of the Sudan as well as of Egypt.

4. Although most governmental leaders in the other Arab states have shown considerable sympathy for MEC, they have not wished to offend Egypt or to go counter to nationalist sentiment against MEC in their own countries. Saudi Arabian and Lebanese leaders have been the most favorably disposed toward MEC. Iraqi leaders approve of MEC in principle, but have advocated superimposing it on the ineffective Arab Security Pact in order to make it more palatable to Arab opinion. Syrian army leaders, who now control the Syrian government, are interested in MEC principally as a means of obtaining assistance from the West.

5. Although Israel has expressed its willingness to cooperate with the Western Powers in building up the defenses of the Middle East against Soviet aggression, it fears that MEC would provide a means for the Arabs to strengthen their armed forces relative to Israel's.

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II. PROSPECTS FOR ESTABLISHMENT OF A MIDDLE EAST DEFENSE ORGANIZATION

6. The solution of the Anglo-Egyptian controversy is essential to the establishment of an inclusive Middle East defense organization. Egypt will not join until its controversy with the UK is settled, and no other Arab nation is likely to if Egypt does not.

7. A settlement of the Anglo-Egyptian controversy that would permit Egyptian participation in a Middle East defense organization would require British acceptance of at least the principle of early and complete evacuation of British troops from Egyptian soil and on British recognition of Farouk's title as King of the Sudan as well as of Egypt. It is almost certain that Egypt will not reduce these demands.

8. Even if these demands were met, it is almost certain that Egypt would not accept a Middle East defense organization which included more than a nominal command structure or which provided for stationing of foreign ground forces in Egypt in peacetime. However, Egypt would probably join a defense organization if its function were limited to: (a) coordinating operational plans; (b) planning Western assistance to the Middle East states for the strengthening of their forces; and (c) negotiating for the use and development of Middle

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East defense facilities by the Organization. In this case, Egypt would probably allow British or other Western technicians to remain in the Suez Canal Zone for maintenance of the bases. Egypt might also cooperate in the formation of an international air defense force in the Zone. However, Egypt would insist that all ground and air bases in the country be under Egyptian command.

9. If Egypt agreed to a Middle East defense organization, the other Arab states would almost certainly agree. The chief motivation in most of these countries, particularly Syria, would be the hope of obtaining substantial amounts of arms, military equipment, and economic aid from the Western Powers. Another important consideration would be the desire of many Arab leaders to associate their countries more closely with the Western bloc without at the same time giving the impression that they are submitting to Western influence. Because of its multilateral character, a Middle East defense organization would be less vulnerable to Arab nationalist criticism than the present UK treaties with Iraq and Jordan, even though these countries would probably not insist on the withdrawal of British forces. Jordan's predominantly tribal society has not yet been deeply affected by the nationalism growing in the other Arab states, and in Iraq extreme nationalistic elements have been kept effectively in check. The country's leaders are more aware than

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the Egyptians of the threat of Soviet aggression and UK-Iraqi relations have been helped by the withdrawal from Iraq of all British forces except a few RAF units and the return to Iraq of control of all but two airfields. Saudi Arabia would join a Middle East defense organization in order to weaken the Arab nationalist contention (to which Ibn Saud is extremely sensitive) that Saudi Arabia is a US puppet. Saudi Arabia is also fully aware of the threat of Soviet aggression. Lebanese leaders would likewise welcome establishment of a Middle East defense organization in the hope that it would lead to closer Western-Arab relations and thus relieve Lebanese government of the necessity of supporting, because of Lebanon's dependent position within the Arab League, anti-Western policies of the other Arab states.

10. By joining in a Middle East defense organization, the Arab States would also hope to increase legitimate US participation in the affairs of the area and reduce what they consider to be undue British and French interference. Despite Arab suspicion that Israeli and Zionist pressures will influence US courses of action and that the US is committed to support the UK in its controversies with the Arab governments, there is a feeling among the people of the area that the US will generously supply arms and other aid to the Arab states without binding them by "unequal treaties" or interfering in their internal affairs. This does not mean that Egypt would accept the substitution of US for British occupation forces on

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its territory or that any of the Arab states would be willing to accord to the US the type of administrative influence which the UK now exerts in Jordan and Iraq. It does, however, mean that the Arab states, generally speaking, would prefer to obtain military and economic assistance from the US than from the UK or France and would prefer to deal with US advisors. Arab cooperation in any Middle East defense organization, therefore, would be likely to increase to the extent that the organization provided a means of increasing legitimate US participation in the affairs of the region and reducing British and French influence therein.

11. Israel would continue to act cautiously with respect to a Middle East defense organization. The Israelis would wish to be included in any program for arming the Middle East states, but would prefer establishing direct military ties with the US and the UK. Israel would probably be unwilling to enter into any arrangement which involved furnishing military information to its Arab neighbors. Moreover, Israel is reluctant to take any overt step calculated to alienate the USSR and thus eliminate all possibility of further Jewish emigration from the Soviet bloc.

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IV. PROBLEMS CONFRONTING A MIDDLE EAST DEFENSE ORGANIZATION

12. While settlement of the Anglo-Egyptian dispute would thus probably lead to the establishment of a regional defense organization capable of channelling Western military aid and advice to the Middle East states and of carrying out some preliminary defense planning and coordination, its development into a more broadly effective organization would remain an extremely difficult task.

13. Militarily, the creation of a Middle East defense organization is unlikely to increase Arab capabilities for self-defense, at least over the next year. Defense of the Middle East would remain handicapped by the non-participation of Iran, which at present strongly opposes military ties with the West. Moreover, the Middle East states would almost certainly refuse to allow significant numbers of Commonwealth troops, even if made available, to be stationed on their soil in time of peace.

14. The effectiveness of a Middle East defense organization as a mechanism for improving Middle East relations with the West would also be subject to serious handicaps. Although the evacuation of British forces from Egypt would eliminate the major irritant in Arab-Western relations, Arab fears and suspicions and intraregional

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rivalries would continue to plague negotiations for establishment of an effective organization. Public opinion, as well as many leaders, would continue to underestimate, ignore, or be fatalistic about the threat of Soviet aggression, which they would regard as far less tangible than the question of Western "interference" or the Palestine issue. Arab leaders would remain suspicious of Western motives, and would be concerned lest the defense organization be used as a means of applying collective pressure on them or re-establishing spheres of influence. Turkey's participation in the organization would do little to reduce these fears.

15. In general, most states would remain motivated primarily by a desire to improve their military strength vis-a-vis their neighbors, and their attitude toward a regional defense organization would depend largely on the amount of military assistance which could be obtained under its aegis. Moreover, the ruling classes in the Arab states have traditionally diverted Arab attention from social discontent by agitation against foreign influence, and the Middle East defense organization might be made a target for such agitation. In Egypt, this agitation might well be directed against the British and other foreign technicians in the Suez Canal base.

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